

Moldova: Democratic resilience tested by hybrid warfare

Description

In September 2025, Moldova resisted an unprecedented Russian interference operation. This small state on the EU's doorstep defended its European path despite a hybrid war waged by Moscow. The election results reveal both the resilience of a fragile democracy and the flaws in Europe's response to destabilization on its borders.

On September 28, 2025, Moldova resisted one of the most [massive interference operations](#) ever documented in Europe. Despite €350 million invested by Moscow, or 1% of Moldova's GDP, President Maia Sandu's Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) won an absolute majority. Beyond a simple electoral victory, this election reveals the changes in contemporary hybrid warfare and raises a crucial question: will the European Union prove worthy of the trust placed in it by the people who chose Europe over intimidation?



Results of parliamentary elections of September 28, 2025

On the morning of September 29, 2025, [Moldova's Central Electoral Commission announced the final results](#): the PAS of pro-European President Sandu had won the parliamentary elections with 50.20% of the vote, securing an absolute majority in Parliament for the second consecutive time, with 55 seats out of 101. The pro-Russian Patriotic Bloc obtained only 24.20% of the vote.

With voter turnout up to 52.21%, this result was much more than a simple election victory: it represented the culmination of an unprecedented democratic challenge, carried out in the face of one of the most massive interference operations ever documented in Europe.

The Kirienko plan: interference at GDP scale

The scale of the resources deployed by Moscow exceeded previously documented. According to Moldovan and Ukrainian security services, [Russia invested around €350 million](#), or approximately 1% of Moldova's GDP. This staggering sum reflects the geopolitical importance the Kremlin attached to this election. The operation, dubbed the « Kirienko plan » after the deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, orchestrated a coordinated effort combining vote buying, cyberattacks, disinformation using artificial intelligence, and manipulation of social media. The financial architecture was based primarily on cryptocurrency networks, circumventing international sanctions and making traceability particularly complex.

This interference was supported by quasi-military logistics applied to the electoral field. For example, the plan included allocating €30 million to transport and pay some 200,000 voters from Transnistria to Moldovan polling stations. This massive mobilization was intended to artificially compensate for the electoral deficit of pro-Kremlin groups, transforming the separatist enclave into an arsenal of information warfare.

Propaganda and infiltration: Moscow's weapons in the digital age

Beyond the financial dimension, the Moldovan election illustrates not so much a break as an evolution in Russian methods of interference: traditional techniques of propaganda and infiltration are now amplified using digital tools and artificial intelligence, enabling unprecedented synchronization between online disinformation, cyberattacks, and electoral corruption. The contamination of the political debate, inspired by the Georgian precedent, was aimed less at promoting pro-Russian groups than at systematically delegitimizing the ruling power. This rhetoric, directly inspired by

the US MAGA movement, systematically pitted « the people » against « globalist elites, » presenting Maia Sandu as a puppet of billionaire George Soros, a recurring target of conspiracy theories. The aim was to divert the debate away from the choice of civilization and reduce it to a binary opposition between « authentic Moldovans » and « traitors who sold to the West. » This divide is indeed part of a civilizational imaginary, but one that has been inverted: it is no longer a question of asserting cultural belonging, but of fabricating an identity divide between a supposedly pure people and a supposedly alienated power. In other words, rhetoric mobilizes the vocabulary of civilizational conflict to delegitimize democracy, not to defend it.

[The Alexandru Bălan affair, which came to light in September 2025](#), perfectly illustrated the cross-border and institutional nature of this hybrid war. The former deputy director of the Moldovan intelligence services was arrested in Romania on September 8, 2025, at Timisoara airport for transmitting state secrets to the Belarusian KGB. The investigation, coordinated by EUROJUST (the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation) with the participation of the Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, and Moldova, revealed systematic infiltration of regional security structures. Two clandestine meetings took place in Budapest between 2024 and 2025, as Belarusian agents were considered more discreet than their Russian counterparts in the Schengen area.

The Bălan case has a particularly insidious dimension: in his public statements, he claimed to be a fervent supporter of European integration and criticized the ineffectiveness of intelligence services in dealing with Russian spy networks. Romanian expert Sorin Ioniță describes him as a « *wolf in sheep's clothing*. » This duplicity revealed the sophistication of the infiltration operations: the most effective agents of influence are not openly pro-Russian activists, but these seemingly pro-European figures who undermine institutional resistance from within.

Institutional counteroffensive: justice and European cooperation

In response to this offensive, the Moldovan authorities deployed a large-scale institutional response, symbolizing a break with the previous political culture, marked by the oligarchic capture of the state. [The extradition of Vladimir Plahotniuc by Greece](#) on September 25, 2025, sent a major political signal: arrested in July 2025, this oligarch, who literally captured the Moldovan state between 2015 and 2019, embodied the old system of endemic corruption. His return to the country is a test for the Moldovan justice system, demonstrating the will to break with the oligarchic impunity that has paralyzed institutions for decades.

The arrest of A. Bălan also illustrates the European dimension of this counteroffensive: coordinated by EUROJUST, this operation revealed unprecedented cooperation between European intelligence services in the face of Russian infiltration networks. The arrest of a former senior Moldovan official on Romanian territory, thanks to Czech intelligence, thus foreshadows the emergence of an integrated regional security architecture. This cooperation is an institutional response to the cross-border dimension of Russia's hybrid warfare.

The Moldovan authorities also took preventive measures directly related to the electoral process. The deliberate limitation of the number of polling stations in Transnistria was explicitly aimed at limiting the possibilities for massive vote buying. Security forces have carried out more than 600 searches since August, arresting dozens of people suspected of wanting to disrupt the elections. On election day, the Moldovan cybersecurity service detected and neutralized several attempts to attack the electoral infrastructure. This preventive mobilization demonstrated strategic anticipation of threats, breaking with previous passivity.

Beyond these defensive measures, European integration itself acts as a vector of resilience. The official opening of accession negotiations in June 2024 and the inclusion of the European course in the Constitution following the October 2024 referendum transformed the geopolitical orientation into a higher legal norm, making any reversal institutionally complex.

A European victory beyond Moldova

The PAS victory extends beyond national electoral success. It demonstrates that a fragile democracy can withstand a massive hybrid offensive orchestrated by a major power. The Moldovan people, despite pressure, have made a resolute

choice in favor of Europe, and this determination sends a powerful political signal far beyond Moldova's borders.

The support of the diaspora played a decisive role. With a turnout of 52.21% among the 277,964 Moldovans living abroad, 78.61% voted for the PAS. This mobilization confirmed this population's deep desire for European integration. Their vote sends a message to compatriots who stayed in Moldova: Europe is not a geopolitical abstraction, but a concrete reality that brings opportunities.

The international reaction illustrates the symbolic significance of the result. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that « *Russia has failed to destabilize Moldova*, » drawing a direct parallel with the war his country is undergoing. French President Emmanuel Macron hailed the victory despite « *attempts at interference*, » while European Council President António Costa saw it as a « *strong and clear message* » in favor of « *democracy and a European future*. » These congratulations recognize the Moldovan victory as a battle won in a wider war to defend the European democratic order.

Moldova's victory imposes concrete responsibilities on the European Union. Maia Sandu declared on September 9 2025, before the European Parliament that « [*if our democracy cannot be protected, then no democracy in Europe is safe*](#). » Moldova therefore serves as a test of Europe's ability to protect peripheral democracies: if the Union had failed to effectively support Chisinau, it would have sent a disastrous signal to other candidate countries exposed to Russian pressure.

This requirement translates into concrete terms. Moldova needs substantial economic assistance to reduce its vulnerability to energy blackmail. It requires enhanced technical support in cybersecurity and the fight against disinformation. It expects constant political support, potentially including a decoupling of Moldova's and Ukraine's accession negotiations to accelerate its integration.

The thirst for Europe expressed on September 28 2025, deserves a response that is commensurate with this challenge, because this aspiration is not the result of Western manipulation, but the authentic expression of a civilizational choice: Moldovans have compared the two models and chosen democracy over authoritarianism. This courageous choice imposes a duty of solidarity on Europe.

Vignette: « [Urne moldave](#) » (copyright: [Maxence](#), [CC BY 2.0](#)).

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To cite this article: Guillaume SANCEY (2025), "Moldova: Democratic resilience tested by hybrid warfare," *Regard sur l'Est*, 17 November.



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date créée

17/11/2025

Champs de Méta

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